

## Chapter 5: Assessing Students and Evaluating Programs

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1200           Successful implementation of instruction can be measured by assessment of  
1201 student progress and evaluation of program effectiveness. It is important that  
1202 assessment efforts reflect coherence between teacher, school, and district instructional  
1203 goals.

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### 1205 *Assessing Student Progress:*

1206           Because the major goal of instruction is to enable students to develop  
1207 proficiency in a language other than English, measures of their progress through the  
1208 stages of the Language Learning Continuum, as outlined in Chapter 2, are essential.

1209 Effective assessment strategies:

- 1210           • Have a clear purpose readily communicated to teachers, students,  
1211 administrators, and parents;
- 1212           • Provide information to guide the teacher in planning instruction;
- 1213           • Measure how well students perform in reading, writing, listening, and speaking;
- 1214           • Have clear and concise criteria;
- 1215           • Include instruments that provide representative samples of what students know  
1216 and are able to do;
- 1217           • Integrate the speaking, listening, reading and writing skills;
- 1218           • Include a wide range of assessment strategies that allow for a variety of  
1219 responses;
- 1220           • Provide students and parents with ongoing information on their progress;
- 1221           • Allow students to monitor and adjust their individual learning strategies; and

- Employ the various forms of assessment described below.

***Purposes of Assessment: Entry-Level, Progress/Monitoring, and Summative***

**Entry-level assessment** analyzes students' ability to communicate as a basis for placing students at an appropriate level in an established foreign language program. In a well-articulated program where students move sequentially through foreign language instruction from elementary school to middle school to high school, student placement is relatively easy. Students who transfer into such a program and who can provide test scores, portfolios of written work, and oral assessment results provide teachers with evidence showing the level of competency attained in the target language.

Difficulties arise in placing students who have moved into a system from outside the district or who speak a language other than English at home. In these cases, teachers can use informal interviews with students to assess their oral work and a writing sample to assess general literacy skills. With this information, the teacher, counselor, and parents can decide together the most appropriate placement level. When a district has a large population of heritage language students, it may establish a standard set of open-ended questions to assess students' competency.

**Progress/monitoring assessment** gathers evidence about students' progress towards achieving objectives as measured in relation to the stages of the Language Learning Continuum, outlined in Chapter 2. This type of assessment will occur on an ongoing basis and may occur at any point in an instructional sequence other than at the end of the course of study. Besides giving important information about student progress, the results of progress/monitoring assessment help teachers make periodic adjustments in instruction and program.

**Summative assessment** judges students' achievements at the end of a unit, chapter, or course of study. This type of assessment may occur at the end of a school year or semester and is usually comprehensive in nature. Beyond the usual teacher-made or publisher-developed tests, these are more elaborate instruments that require intensive training to administer. Developed by local, national, or international language associations as well as by language researchers, they include the California Golden State, Advanced Placement, and International Baccalaureate Examinations.

***Forms of Assessment: Achievement and Performance-Based***

**Achievement tests**, a type of assessment most familiar to classroom teachers, measures student mastery of specific content, structures, and vocabulary. Achievement tests measure what has been taught using specific materials. Students can study for achievement tests, and scores are derived by comparing the performance of students to one another on a norm-referenced test. In **performance-based assessment**, learners demonstrate their ability to use their knowledge and skills to communicate in a real-world context. In keeping with the Language Learning Continuum, suggestions of compatible assessments include four tests: the Classroom Oral Competency Interview (COCI), the Classroom Writing Competency Assessment (CWCA), Classroom Receptive Competency Matrix (CRCM), and the Foreign Language Oral Skills Evaluation Matrix (FLOSEM).

The COCI and the CWCA were developed by the California Foreign Language Project (CFLP). The COCI is an interactive, holistic assessment of oral performance conducted in a natural conversation-like exchange between an interviewer and a second language learner. It takes into consideration the context of the communicative foreign

language classroom at the secondary level where teachers need a process for evaluating oral language in a manner that is administered, scored, and interpreted rapidly and easily. The COCI targets a relatively restricted scope of language performance, and it divides this language into three major ranges: formulaic, created, and planned language. Within the first range, formulaic language, student performance is limited to comprehension and production of unanalyzed “chunks” of language or memorized formulas. Within the second range, created language, student performance involves rearranging and recombining language components to create utterances and statements in sentences that express personal meaning. Within the third range, planned language, students demonstrate their ability to coordinate created utterances and statements beyond sentences into paragraphs. Within those major ranges, the COCI focuses on the nature of the language used; it characterizes that use in three subcategories or phases for each of the ranges: low, mid, and high. It takes approximately five to seven minutes to administer the COCI, and it takes the student from a “warm-up” to a dialogue intended to establish a range, aided by probing questions, to a “wind-down.”

The CWCA was developed to offer teachers an integrated process for creating and assessing writing tasks in order to provide tangible indicators of increases in student writing competency. The test provides learners with numerous opportunities to develop their writing as they integrate, apply, and extend their language in response to the demands of various tasks. The CWCA divides this language use into the three major ranges described above: formulaic, created, and planned language. Students produce a writing sample following a given prompt. Prompts must be created based on the following format: context, text, function, and content. Prompts should be designed so that the writer receives a clear understanding of the “context” for writing (e.g., an

exchange student coming to the U.S. has sent you a letter with a request for information on what to expect upon arrival), the “text type” to be produced (e.g., writing a letter), the “function” (providing information to complete the task), and the content area to be explored (e.g., family life).

The creators of the COCI and the CWCA recommend that these assessments be administered after completion of one year of language study at the secondary level.

Because ratings on oral assessment instruments are more reliable when performed by someone other than the students’ teacher, it is advisable that schools and teachers collaborate to create a school-wide or district-wide oral proficiency assessment project (Huebner and Jensen, 1992). CFLP offers training on the COCI and the CWCA to all foreign language teachers in California through its regional professional development programs.

In order to develop the ability to produce language, language learners must have internalized it. Receptive competency, like its productive counterpart, develops in ranges: formulaic—the ability to understand learned formulas; created—the ability to understand sentence-level relationships; planned—the ability to understand paragraph-level relationships; extended—the ability to understand relationships in language beyond the paragraph.

Also created by the California Foreign Language Project, the Classroom Receptive Competency Matrix (CRCM) was designed to validate growth in receptive competency. It complements the COCI and the CWCA by using similarly constructed prompts and rating criteria. Listening and reading prompts from the CRCM may be administered frequently and be included in individual portfolios or be used for program evaluation. Three elements must be considered in constructing prompts to develop and

1318 assess receptive competency: (1) the oral or written text to be understood; (2) the tasks  
1319 to be carried out on the text; and (3) the context in which this is to occur.

1320 The CRCM assesses the development of listening and reading proficiency  
1321 necessary to attain the outcomes described in the Language Learning Continuum, as  
1322 can be seen by the following descriptions contained in the document:

- 1323
- 1324 • Learners functioning within Stage I of the Language Learning Continuum can  
1325 identify memorized words, phrases, sentences (formulas) in unfamiliar texts  
1326 within highly predictable common daily settings.  
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  - 1328 • Learners functioning within Stage II of the Language Learning Continuum can  
1329 understand the overall meaning, key ideas, and some supporting details  
1330 (sentence-level relationships) in texts related to self and the immediate  
1331 environment within informal and transactional settings.  
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  - 1333 • Learners functioning within Stage III of the Language Learning Continuum can  
1334 understand the main ideas and most supporting details (paragraph-level  
1335 relationships) in texts on concrete and factual topics of public interest within  
1336 most informal and some formal settings related to the external environment.  
1337
  - 1338 • Learners functioning within Stage IV of the Language Learning Continuum can  
1339 understand the ideas and most supporting details (relationships in language  
1340 beyond the paragraph) in texts on unfamiliar, abstract, practical, social and

professional topics within most formal and informal settings and problem situations.

Teachers learn to create CRCM prompts and administer a sufficient number of them to identify a student's stage of performance along the Language Learning Continuum.

The FLOSEM was developed by the School of Education at Stanford University. It is designed to provide a global rating of the foreign language learner's ability to comprehend, to speak, and to be understood by others. The FLOSEM is similar to the Student Oral Language Observation Matrix (SOLOM) in that it allows for the assigning of a global rating in the areas of comprehension, fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar. (The SOLOM, however, has been used largely with English language learners.) For each category, there are six possible levels at which students can be rated, ranging from "extremely limited ability" (Level 1) through "native-like ability" (Level 6). A description of the general criteria for assessing students' ability at each level is also provided. The FLOSEM can be administered at any level, grade kindergarten through twelve. It may be used as both a pre- and post-test. However, it should be noted that, because mastering foreign language oral skills takes time and practice, administering the FLOSEM on a high-frequency basis (e.g., once a week) would not necessarily yield useful information. Creators of the FLOSEM recommend that it be administered two or three times in an academic school year: once after a month of initial instruction, at the end of the first semester, and again at the end of the school year. They also recommend that raters observe the learners' performance over a range of language-use tasks and over an extended period of at least

one month. Finally, creators recommend that classroom teachers administer the FLOSEM since they are most informed about students' communicative abilities.

In addition to the performance-based assessments mentioned above, sample assessment activities have been developed by the Articulation and Achievement Project to support the Language Learning Continuum. (A description of the Project and an outline of the Language Learning Continuum can be found in Chapter 2.) Included are examples of both oral and written assessments, along with sample portfolio templates. Also included are rubrics for holistic scoring of student work. An example of a written assessment for Stage II French from the Project follows:

Student # \_\_\_\_\_

#### STAGE II French

Directions: Before beginning to write, think about what you want to say in order to write a well-organized letter. Leave time at the end to look over your work and to make corrections if necessary. You will have 30 minutes to complete this assignment.

*Write a short letter to your pen pal in Quebec or another French-speaking part of Canada. Tell him or her that your close friend is going to travel there during the school vacation. Describe your friend as fully as possible.*

*You may want to write about age, appearance, likes, and dislikes. You may also add any information about your friend you think your pen pal will find interesting.*



Interested parties can contact the College Board for further information on the foregoing.

### ***Grade Level Considerations***

The Language Learning Continuum presents foreign language acquisition in terms of stages. This means that certain stages, especially I and II, can be taught at different grade level spans. Instruction and assessment for Stage I could occur at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. Instruction and assessment for Stage II would most likely occur at the middle school and high school levels. Instruction and assessment should be aligned to the pertinent stage and sensitive to the grade-level abilities of the students. Students at different grade levels will attain similar levels of proficiency; academic content and contexts are components of proficiency and will be handled differently by students at different ages and grade levels.

When conducting assessment for Stages I and II, grade level considerations need to be taken into account. While grade level considerations are necessary in constructing appropriate assessments, the overall goal is language proficiency, as described in the Language Learning Continuum. There are two variables that influence the nature of foreign language assessment: the students' stage on the Language Learning Continuum and the students' grade level. An assessment activity requiring students to create and present a story in the target language can differ markedly based on these two variables. For example, third graders at Stage I on the Continuum would most likely create a story using very simple language with very basic content (e.g., a day at school). By contrast, sixth graders entering Stage III, with extensive foreign language education since kindergarten, would probably create a linguistically

sophisticated story; the topic would be of interest to that particular grade level (e.g., sports). For students in grade 9 at Stage I, the language would most likely lack sophistication, but the topic would be of interest to ninth graders (e.g., music). For seniors at Stage II, the language of the story would probably be more sophisticated than that produced by the ninth graders; the topic of the story would be of interest to students about to graduate from high school (e.g., dating).

During the first three years of elementary school (K-2), most foreign language assessment is conducted orally. As students learn to write, teachers evaluate their writing skills in the foreign language as well, and teachers of students in grades 3 to 5 administer a wider variety of assessments. There are several sources for assessment instruments appropriate for elementary school students:

- Instructor developed summative instruments (Curtain and Pesola, 1994);
- Summative instruments developed by the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL);
- The CAL Oral Proficiency Exam (COPE) for assessing language proficiency of full and partial immersion students at the elementary level; and
- The CAL Foreign Language in Elementary Schools (FLES) Test for use with students in FLES programs.

Assessment at the middle school level becomes more extensive and sophisticated. Progress/monitoring assessment at the end of a chapter or unit of study includes testing for formal knowledge (gender, tense, idiomatic expressions). It also measures how well students use the language in hypothetical situations—ordering from a restaurant menu, writing a letter to a pen pal.

At the high school level, assessment mirrors the increased complexity of objectives. Assessments provide teachers with information about the ability of students to analyze language elements such as tense, reflect upon relationships between word order and meaning, and recognize phrases and idioms that do not translate directly from one language to another. Teachers “create an examination that will require students to show how well they can use specified features of the language and to demonstrate that they understand how such features function within naturalistic discourse” (Omaggio-Hadley, *Teaching Language in Context*, 1993, p. 413).

### ***Portfolios and Assessment***

Portfolios may be used as one classroom indicator of student progress and growth. They may provide information for assessing student progress or placement at appropriate levels of instruction (Padilla, Aninao, and Sung, 1996). They may also be used for self-assessment by students or for meeting district requirements at the classroom level. Portfolios may contain a variety of artifacts for assessment, including:

- Written samples of student projects and creative writing;
- Results of writing competency assessments;
- Video-recorded presentations that demonstrate students’ skills and knowledge of the target language and culture; and
- Audiocassettes of oral proficiency assessments to record performance from year to year.

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1456 ***Heritage Language Assessments***

1457       Many students entering California schools who speak a language other than  
1458 English display varying abilities and skills in their heritage language. After both oral  
1459 and written assessment, these students can be placed in a language program. It is  
1460 important to ensure that both oral and literacy assessment be conducted in the native  
1461 language of these students. When possible, heritage language students should be  
1462 placed in classes for native speakers. These students should be assessed annually using  
1463 appropriate instruments for their level. This may require specially designed measures  
1464 since students' language skills may very well be beyond the level of most instruments  
1465 used with regular students in foreign language classes.

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1467 ***Advanced Placement, Golden State, and International Baccalaureate Examinations***

1468       Several different types of examinations exist that are appropriate for students  
1469 who have completed four to six years of language study. Many high school language  
1470 students and home language speakers opt to take the College Board's Advanced  
1471 Placement (AP) tests, given in May. These tests measure students' competency in  
1472 listening, reading, writing, speaking, and literature, and are scored by readers with  
1473 extensive training by the Educational Testing Service (<http://www.ets.org>). Students  
1474 who score a 3, 4, or 5 on the 0-5 AP scale receive transferable college credit, thus  
1475 validating their high school studies and/or home language knowledge. Scores on the  
1476 AP tests help teachers evaluate their programs in relation to national norms and  
1477 standards.

The Golden State Examination (GSE) has been developed and is administered by the California Department of Education (<http://www.cde.ca.gov>). It consists of two 45-minute sessions, one for listening and reading, and one for writing. Students demonstrate competency in the language studied by responding to listening selections and to reading prompts. The GSE is given to assess students' level of competency at the end of the second year of high school Spanish instruction or its equivalent. Students scoring at level four, five, or six are awarded recognition, honors, and high honors, respectively. Students scoring at level three and below are acknowledged for their participation.

Students enrolled in one of the 1,000 high schools certified by the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) in various countries throughout the world take exams in the two languages as required as part of this two-year, comprehensive curriculum. They receive a score of 1 (lowest) to 7 (highest) on a criterion-referenced exam graded by examiners trained by the IBO (<http://www.ibo.org>). Some universities offer advanced standing or course credit to students with strong results on these exams.

#### ***Program Evaluation***

The extent of the success of any foreign language program is demonstrated by the extent to which students achieve expected levels of proficiency. Other indicators of program success include the following:

- Results of the COCI, CWCA, CRCM, and FLOSEM;
- The number of students who complete two years of foreign language study;
- The number of students who continue the study of a foreign language at each subsequent level; and

- The number of students who meet performance and content expectations.

In addition to these items, other factors contribute to the success of a foreign

language program:

- The number of foreign language teachers holding credentials;
- The number and variety of foreign languages offered;
- The degree of involvement of the foreign language teacher in a sustained program of professional development;
- The support accorded the language program by the local and district administration;
- The degree of support of parents and of community organizations for the foreign language curriculum; and
- The amount of teacher-led travel to countries where target languages are spoken.

Individuals interested in foreign language programs use the results of these indicators to discover program strengths and to identify areas that need improvement.